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SUBJECT: KIRKUKI GROUPS WEIGH IN ON PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS,
UNAMI EFFORTS, STATUS OF CHRISTIANS

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary. Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq Tom Krajeski visited Kirkuk with United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) Political Director Andrew Gilmour to gauge reactions to recent debates over Kirkuk's provincial elections and UNAMI's work on disputed internal boundaries. Turkomen members of the Kirkuk Provincial Council (PC) called for both delaying the Kirkuk election and implementing the 32-32-32-4 solution (an idea from the Turkish government that the Kurds, Arabs, and Turkomen each receive 32% of PC seats, with Christians and other minorities receiving 4%); Kurds supported the former proposal and opposed the latter, and Arabs supported the latter but opposed the former. All three avoided serious comment on UNAMI's first four proposals for disputed territories since none dealt with Kirkuk, but criticized UNAMI for perceived slights including harboring biases in favor of other ethnic groups and ignoring historical injustices. Finally, a group of Kirkuki Christians argued that although the Christian community has dwindled by up to 90% since 2003, extremists generally do not specifically target Christians and the community's primary quarrels are with each other. End summary.

Kurdish Governor, PC Chair: No Election Quotas,
Referendum Still the Answer

12. (C) Kirkuk Governor Abd al-Rahman Mustafa (a Kurd), accompanied by a silent Deputy Governor Rakan (an Arab), stressed that Kirkuk is not the "powder keg" that many claim) past and present battles over the city had been between contending governments, not Kirkuk residents, who have no problem coexisting despite their differing views of the city's political future. The final decision on Kirkuk's status must come from the Kirkuki population, not merely its political parties. Mustafa extrapolated from this principle that a referendum is the only proper means of resolving the dispute, and that the 32-32-32-4 proposal is unhelpful because it discourages voting across ethnic lines. PC Chairman Rizgar Ali, the strongest figure in the province due to his connections in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), repeated that the Kurds absolutely reject the 32-32-32-4 electoral scheme, and complained that the Iraqi High Electoral Commission (IHEC) must improve the distribution of Kirkuk's polling centers or Rizgar will reject their presence. Rizgar expressed his personal preference for open list elections and opposition to delaying the Kirkuk election; the latter position contrasts with that of the national Kurdish leadership, but in Rizgar's mind would demonstrate Iraqi unity.

Kurdish Bloc: Suspicious of UNAMI But Still Cooperating

13. (C) Gilmour briefed members of the Kurdish bloc on UNAMI's plan to offer at least three or four possible compromise solutions for Kirkuk, none of which will recommend either total KRG or GOI control of the city. The Kurds took this in stride, suggesting they may be more prepared for such

a mixed outcome than they let on in their public discourse. Muhammad Kamal said the Kurds plan to cooperate with UNAMI, although they admittedly had hoped UNAMI would assume only a technical role in implementing Article 140. Other bloc members reiterated familiar Kurdish arguments, such as that Article 140 merits scrupulous implementation because it earned popular consensus alongside the rest of Iraq's constitution in the 2005 referendum, that Kirkuk's status must be resolved with an eye to remedying past injustice, and that the 2005 election results should be the primary determinant of Kirkuk's demographics. More positively, Muhammad Kamal at the end of the meeting repeated Gov. Mustafa's point that Kirkuk is not the "powder keg" of popular belief, despite internal differences of opinion on its final political status.

¶4. (C) Andrew Gilmour responded that while UNAMI is working to implement the "spirit" of Article 140 and recognizes the grievances behind it, the article has two problems. First, most politicians in Baghdad do not want it implemented in the way the Kurds envision, and second, the article had an expiration date at the end of 2007. UNAMI worked to extend the implementation period, and since the end of last year has been accused constantly of following the "Kurdish agenda" because the article is dead in many Arabs' minds. UNAMI does support a referendum as stipulated in 140, but not in the present circumstances) a political agreement is necessary first which could garner a huge majority in a referendum, whereas a referendum today would merely destabilize Kirkuk.

Arab Bloc: 32% Solution, No Election Delay

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¶5. (C) Krajieski and Gilmour met Arab PC members and then the Hawija district council led by Abu Saddam, the tribal strongman in the overwhelmingly Sunni Arab district in southwestern Kirkuk province. Representatives of the Arab bloc were particularly concerned with the upcoming provincial elections. They fretted that Chamchamal or other predominantly Kurdish districts would be added to Kirkuk province and thus boost significantly the Kurdish percentage of the electorate, and complained about the large numbers of Kurds who have moved to Kirkuk since 2003 who they claim never lived there under Saddam. The Arab bloc offered several demands for elections: 1) do not delay them after other provincial elections; 2) implement the 32-32-32-4 solution; 3) establish four polling centers, so that each of those groups can oversee its own balloting; 4) designate a UN representative to monitor all voter registration; and 5) move the IHEC office out of its current location in a Kurdish neighborhood so that all groups can access it equally. At the Hawija district council meeting, Krajieski stressed the need for all sides to compromise, prompting an impassioned plea from Abu Saddam that one group (the Kurds) dominates Kirkuk and he has nothing left to give up.

Turkomen Bloc: 32% Solution, Delay Election

¶6. (C) PC members from the Iraqi Turkomen Front (ITF) focused on provincial elections, demanding both a delay for Kirkuk and the 32-32-32-4 breakdown of PC seats. PC member Hasan Toran specified that this system should apply to at least the first two provincial election cycles, one more than the Turkomen had demanded previously, and said a delay would help the parties negotiate other details of the elections. The PC members also lamented the fact that negotiations on the election law have moved from the COR to the PCNS, where the Turkomen have no representatives. Toran and his colleagues then offered a litany of complaints about UNAMI) that hollow Kurdish threats of violence to obtain Kirkuk had intimidated UNAMI and that the selection of territories considered "disputed" revealed a pro-Kurdish bias. Perhaps

not expecting such extensive criticism of UNAMI) criticism which contrasted with the muted Turkomen public reaction to UNAMI's first proposals) PC member Zhala Yunus argued that only "one group" (the Kurds) had criticized UNAMI,s efforts, implying Kurdish unwillingness to accept a fair compromise.

Christians: If We Had Guns, We'd Kill Each Other

17. (C) Pastor Haytham, a politically active evangelical in Kirkuk, estimated that up to 90 percent of Kirkuki Christians have fled Iraq since 2003. He said only those too poor to pay for transit remain, and even they would leave without hesitation if they accumulated the \$8,000 necessary to go. Nonetheless, the pastor denied that Christians are being targeted specifically) while there have been many attempts to blow up churches, Kirkuki militants rarely have targeted individual Christians, and the more significant reason for the exodus is the general uncertainty about Kirkuk's future. He said for now it would be better for Christians if Kirkuk joins the KRG because the Kurds are more democratic, though this may not always be the case. The other problem with the GOI, in his view, is the ongoing influence of religion in politics) Maliki himself may be a good man, but he still seeks regular counsel in Najaf. Finally, the pastor sheepishly noted that Iraqi Christians do not always get along with each other, and emphasized the point by saying if Christians were as well-armed as Sunnis and Shia, the first people they would kill would be each other.

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